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# Review Of Administration Of Selected Aspects Of The Student-Tutor Education Program By The National Endowment For The Humanities

B-158817

National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities

BY THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

SEPT. 22, 1971

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COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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Dear Mrs. Green:

In accordance with your request, we examined into certain aspects of a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities to Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, to operate the Student-Tutor Education Program (STEP). 475  
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We agreed that we would obtain information on (1) the legislative authority for the program, (2) whether the Endowment had consulted with the Federal Bureau of Prisons or other Federal agencies prior to its decision to participate in the program, (3) the basis for selecting participants in the program, (4) the number of participants in the program, and (5) the payments made to participants in the program before and after their release from prison.

We examined records and interviewed officials of the Endowment; the Massachusetts Department of Corrections, Parole Office, and Parole Board; the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration of the Department of Justice; and Brandeis University. We also met with the director of the program and some of the tutors directly involved in it.

The purpose of STEP, as conceived by its director, was to identify prison inmates with the intellectual capacity for benefiting from college-level training. The program was conducted at selected Massachusetts prisons for inmates who, it was believed, would be helped by courses in the humanities to find jobs or to continue their education on college campuses after their release from prison.

The program was established in June 1968 by the Florence Heller Graduate School for Advanced Studies in Social Welfare at Brandeis University after approval was obtained from prison officials and officers of the Massachusetts Department of Corrections. During 1968-69, the first year of the program, funds of \$21,800 were provided by a private foundation and Brandeis University. No Federal funds were provided.

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Because of the heavy liberal arts emphasis of the program and in order to demonstrate the value of the humanities in helping convicted criminals reenter society successfully, Brandeis University in February 1969, submitted an application to the Endowment for Federal financial assistance for STEP activities.

In accordance with the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act, the National Council on the Humanities reviews applications and makes recommendations on them to the Chairman of the Endowment. In May 1969, after the Council had reviewed and approved the application, the Endowment advised Brandeis that it would award a grant of \$30,250 provided that an equal amount was made available by private sources. Two private organizations--the Charles E. Merrill Trust and the Marcus Foundation--provided the matching funds.

In the first year of STEP, prior to the period of Endowment financial assistance, the program was offered only at the maximum-security prison at Walpole, Massachusetts. During the second year 1969-70, when Endowment support was provided, the program was offered also at the medium-security prison at Norfolk, Massachusetts, and at the Industrial School for Boys at Shirley, Massachusetts. The Endowment is no longer providing financial support for the program; however, it is still being carried out at the three institutions.

The program at Shirley currently is being administered by Brandeis University and is being funded with State and Federal funds. The Federal funds are made available to the State through the Committee on Law Enforcement and Administration of Criminal Justice (State planning agency) by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration of the Department of Justice. It is anticipated that, for the year from September 1970 through August 1971, about \$120,000 of Law Enforcement funds will have been furnished for the program at Shirley. Thus, although STEP is no longer being financed by the Endowment, Federal funds are being made available by the Department of Justice through Law Enforcement grants.

The acting executive director of the State planning agency advised us that the State Department of Corrections had received \$28,000 from the State planning agency to enable the STEP program currently being conducted at Walpole and Norfolk prisons to be continued through August 1971.

The acting executive director told us that, of the funds the State planning agency had requested from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration for its next year's operations, \$100,000 was for education services for inmates at correctional institutions at the State and county level. There has been no determination as to whether any of this amount will be made available for STEP training.

Legislative authority and precedent for the program

The National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, approved September 29, 1965 (20 U.S.C. 951), states as one of its purposes that it is necessary and appropriate for the Federal Government to assist and add to programs for the advancement of the humanities by local, State, regional, and private agencies and their organizations.

The act provides that the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, with the advice of the Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities and the National Council on the Humanities, is authorized to develop and encourage the pursuit of a national policy for the promotion of progress and scholarship in the humanities. Under the act the Chairman is authorized specifically to

- initiate and support research and programs to strengthen the teaching potential in the humanities by making arrangements (including contracts and grants) with individuals or groups to support such activities and
- award fellowships and grants to institutions or individuals for training and workshops in the humanities.

According to a report prepared by the Endowment in November 1970, precedence for assistance from Federal agencies in prison education and rehabilitation programs is well established. Assistance for such programs has been provided by the Department of Justice; by the Department of Labor; by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, through both the Office of Education and the National Institute of Mental Health; and by the Office of Economic Opportunity.

For example, Project Newgate in Oregon, which was supported by the Office of Economic Opportunity, was an experimental program providing college-level courses to inmates of correctional institutions. It was begun at the Oregon State Prison, Salem, Oregon, in 1967 and was expanded in 1969 to institutions in four other States. Also the Endowment previously supported a similar educational experiment in 1968-69 by the Pennsylvania State University which provided instruction in the humanities for inmates at the Pennsylvania State Correctional Institution, Camp Hill, Pennsylvania.

We were advised by the acting Chairman of the Endowment that the declaration of purpose of the act and the authority granted under the act are broad and enable the Endowment to sponsor such programs as STEP. We agree that the Endowment has the necessary authority to sponsor such programs.

#### Award of grant

According to Endowment files, the initial proposal submitted by Brandeis in support of its request for financial assistance for STEP was considered by a panel of experts in the educational field. Endowment officials advised us that they customarily used such panels to review applications submitted for grant assistance. The summary of the STEP proposal, as prepared by the panel for the consideration of the National Council on the Humanities, stated that:

"The Student-Tutor Education Project is a model designed to become a part of prison education systems. It tests the viability of an educational program for inmates of notable, if unrecognized intellectual capacity, hypothesizing that the development of the prisoner's potential will affect positively his rehabilitation after release. STEP identifies these students and prepares them for further study at colleges or professional schools leading to appropriate occupational roles. Operating full-time, year-round, STEP membership is voluntary, students are remunerated. The group of 12 to 15 students, led by two tutors, discuss assigned readings in a seminar setting. Individual help is given on basic skills. Approach is interdisciplinary,

with a single subject, drawn from the humanities, considered from various viewpoints over several weeks. Performance is measured by tests and impressionistic reports. Assistance is given in planning for post-release placement; close and continuous follow-up permits evaluation. To determine the optimum age-group for a program of this sort, three projects will be established; one of older, high-rate recidivists; one of young-adult inmates, and one of adolescent inmates."

The panel found the proposal to be reasonable but recommended consultation with the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The panel recommended support for 1 year and the Endowment staff concurred with the panel.

Our review of the minutes of the meeting of the National Council, at which the approval of the STEP grant was recommended, indicates that the Endowment requested comments of the Bureau of Prisons but that no comments were received. The following year, when the Endowment was considering a request from Brandeis to extend financing of STEP, comments were requested again from the Bureau of Prisons. In July 1970 a Bureau education research specialist advised the Endowment that:

"Brandeis' proposal to offer an education program with a liberal arts focus for the adult offender is a very desirable extension of the first year's effort which was directed toward the younger inmate."

The research specialist recommended approval of the project. There was no indication that any other Federal agencies were consulted prior to approval of the grant for STEP.

#### Program activities and inmate participation

During the first year of operation and prior to financial support by the Endowment, courses were given in mathematics, English, and science but college credits could not be earned by participants. Twenty-four inmates participated in the program.

During the second year when financial support was provided by the Endowment, tutors were accredited by Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, and college credits could be earned for various courses in English, introduction to literature, rhetoric and effective speech, earth sciences, history, and psychology. Noncredit courses were given in remedial mathematics, business and economics, and playreading. During this period, 23 inmates at the maximum-security prison at Walpole, 19 inmates at the medium-security prison at Norfolk, and 47 inmates at the Industrial School for Boys at Shirley participated in the program.

Under the current program, being continued without Endowment assistance, college-credit courses are offered in literature, philosophy, sociology, political science, business and management, and earth sciences. Noncredit courses are offered in remedial mathematics and playreading. We have been informed that 14 inmates at Walpole and 26 inmates at Norfolk are participating in the program.

The STEP program at Shirley has been taken over by the State of Massachusetts and is being supported with Federal funds made available by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. At the request of the State authorities, the STEP staff has assumed responsibility for the entire academic program at Shirley.

All prisoners participating in STEP were volunteers. When the program began, an announcement was distributed to each inmate explaining the program and requesting those interested to schedule interviews with the program staff. We were informed by the program director that they selected the inmates to participate in the program and that, although there were no formal educational prerequisites for participation, they tried to select the brighter and younger inmates who might benefit from the program and continue their education after release.

The director pointed out that, on the basis of the interviews, some inmates who were self-educated but had less than a formal high school education were allowed to participate in the program. We were informed also that, in making the selections, consideration was given to the inmates' sentences and that participation in the program generally was limited to those who had a possibility of parole in 2 to 5 years.

Participants in the program received a payment of 25 cents a day from STEP funds during the time that they were in the program. The payment was in addition to the usual minimum payment of 25 cents a day made to all inmates by the State. The program director told us that prisoners who work receive an additional 25 cents a day and that the payment of STEP funds was to replace the additional money the STEP participants could have earned by doing other work rather than participating in the program.

We were advised by the coordinator of sponsored research, Brandeis University, that, during the period of Endowment support, about \$2,300 was paid to inmates participating in STEP but that these payments were made from funds made available to STEP by the Charles E. Merrill Trust and the Marcus Foundation and not from Federal funds. The program director told us that no STEP funds, private or Federal, were used for any postrelease payments to STEP participants.

As noted previously the Endowment supported the program for only 1 year. Brandeis had applied for extension of Endowment funding, and in August 1970 the Endowment made a conditional offer to support the program through 1973 in the requested amount of \$193,752. In September 1970, however, there was a bank robbery during which a police officer was killed, and the authorities charged five persons with complicity in the robbery, including three former STEP students, one who subsequently had attended Brandeis and two who were to attend Northeastern University. The robbery, in which the former participants in STEP were involved, caused the Endowment to question its ability to sponsor successfully a program involving the rehabilitation of persons with criminal backgrounds.

The Endowment, on the basis of its review of the program, questioned its own competence to evaluate prison education programs and concluded:

\*\*\*\* Important as the inclusion of a humanistic dimension is in college programs for prisoners, the Endowment's staff hasn't the extensive capacity to make complex judgments in that field that it has in other fields where non-educational factors are less important. To develop such staff expertise could

be justified only if the Endowment were to make prison education a major undertaking, which it does not wish to do, and which in any case would put it in overlap with the several older, larger, and more experienced Federal agencies already providing assistance in the field.

"The conclusions for the Endowment seem clearly indicated: In the future, to the extent that the Endowment participates in programs of prison education at all, it will do so only by seeking joint arrangements (perhaps to fund humanities segments of larger programs, for example) with Federal agencies such as O.E.O. that are working substantially in the field. As for STEP, it is not such a program; accordingly the Endowment has terminated participation in it."

Effect of the program on participants

The STEP staff did not conduct any formal follow-up on paroled inmates who had participated in the program. If a former participant so desires, he is encouraged to keep in touch with the staff by telephone or by occasional meetings. The program staff maintains information relating to the addresses, jobs held, or attendance at schools for those former participants who desire to maintain this contact. Information concerning all former participants is maintained by the State Parole Service.

The program officials advised us in June 1971 that the information they had concerning the 20 participants in STEP who had been released on parole was as follows:

- Three had been returned to prison.
- One had violated parole and was in a drug treatment center.
- Five were working at some form of gainful employment.

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- Two had moved out of the State, and no further information was available.
- Five were enrolled in education or job-training programs.
- Two had not furnished information as to their whereabouts.
- One had been returned to jail and subsequently had been paroled.
- One was deceased.

The three participants who were again in prison were the three men charged with complicity in the bank robbery during which the police officer was shot to death. An Endowment report on STEP pointed out that the men charged with the crime were released by the Parole Board which had the sole authority in the matter. The report noted that the program officials provided the Parole Board with information on the participants in STEP eligible for parole. The report noted also that this was only one source of information used by the Parole Board and that the Endowment had no evidence that the program officials had had any undue influence on the parole decisions.

This point of view generally was confirmed by the chairman of the Massachusetts Parole Board who told us that board members' decisions on paroles were based primarily on attitudes of the inmates. The chairman stated that the most important factor considered was what an inmate represented to himself and the community. He added that participation in STEP could have had a bearing on a board member's decision, but that an inmate who had not improved his attitude, whether he had taken part in STEP or any other educational or rehabilitation program, would not be considered for parole.

We plan to make no further distribution of this report unless copies are specifically requested, and then we shall make distribution only after your agreement has been obtained or public announcement has been made by you concerning the contents of the report.

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We hope that this information will be of assistance to you.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James B. Axtell".

Comptroller General  
of the United States

The Honorable Edith Green  
House of Representatives